

## Behavioral Health

### Overview

Intermediate units (IUs) play a vital role in bridging gaps between schools, communities, and state agencies to enhance student wellbeing. Through coordinated resources and innovative services, IUs aim to provide expertise and professional development for school staff to address student behavior concerns and improve mental health support so all students thrive.

### Key Points

- Students continue to grapple with increased anxiety, stress, and social disengagement among students. Nearly 50% of adolescents indicated persistent sadness or hopelessness in a 2023 report, with suicide rates for ages 10–24 increasing by 24% over the last decade.
- IUs are well-positioned to provide critical programs and services to students in need of behavioral support in collaboration with county partners.
- Overburdened school counselors and psychologists leave many students without needed care, especially in rural areas.
- IUs deliver evidence-based programs, crisis response teams, and professional development to help schools address students' behavioral health needs so all children can learn and feel safe.

### Policy Requests

#### Enhance School-Based Behavioral Health Services:

- Support IUs in establishing behavioral health systems for schools.
- Expand the availability of counseling, social work, and trauma-informed practices for children to address a wide range of challenges.

#### Expand Workforce Capacity:

- Fund paid internships and workforce development programs in partnership with higher education institutions.
- Offer competitive compensation and professional development for behavioral health professionals.

#### Reform Partial Hospitalization Program (PHP) Regulations:

- Expand access to a continuum of service models that meets students' needs beyond the local school setting.

### Budget Request

- **Invest in student wellbeing** by funding increased access to services, workforce development, and interagency collaboration to reduce wait times for services.

By prioritizing students behavioral health, Pennsylvania can ensure that every child has the scaffolding they need to learn, grow, and thrive.

